

Caribbean Cosmopolitanism: Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and René Pérez Joglar's *Residente*

Kathleen Cunniffe Peña
Wilson College
kathleencunniffepena@wilson.edu

“All the great artists have had one foot in and one foot out.”
– Terry Eagleton, *Saint Oscar*

In recent political discourse, “cosmopolitanism” has become synonymous with elitism and disloyalty to national values. However, this discourse ignores the varied history of cosmopolitanism, both as an aesthetic and a worldview. Not all cosmopolitanism is rootless, as demonstrated by Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Ethics of Identity* (2005), which proposes identity based on “rooted cosmopolitanism.” And as James Clifford (1997) points out, travel—and cosmopolitanism, along with it—is no longer, or perhaps never has been, reserved for wealthy elites. Clifford emphasizes that travel not only includes “Westerners” traveling to developing countries but also the reverse, and the second kind of traveler follows a different trajectory of cosmopolitanism. This article examines cosmopolitanism in the work of two contemporary Caribbean artists: Dominican-American author Junot Díaz and Puerto Rican musician René Juan Pérez Joglar. The protagonist of Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) lives the tensions inherent in nationalist and cosmopolitan impulses: like the author, the novel moves between the Dominican Republic and the United States. The title alludes to Irish writer and famed cosmopolitan, Oscar Wilde. Although criticism of the novel has not drawn any connection to Wilde beyond the title itself, this paper suggests that Díaz's work relates to Wilde on deeper levels related to cosmopolitanism, particularly as Wilde tied this notion to the struggle for individualism. Similar notions surface in Pérez Joglar's music and recent documentary film, *Residente*, presenting a rooted cosmopolitanism that, while acknowledging national history and culture, pushes the boundaries of identity across the globe.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism; Oscar Wilde; Junot Díaz; Juan Pérez Joglar; *Residente*; *Oscar Wao*

Introduction: Contemporary Cosmopolitanism

As nationalist sentiments and tensions rise in Europe and the United States, conservative news media depict global consciousness and citizenship as an unrealistic, elitist position. Following the Brexit vote, British prime minister Theresa May targeted the “international elite” in her conference

speech, positing: “If you believe you’re a citizen of the world, you’re a citizen of nowhere” (qtd. in Skovgaard-Smith, 2017). However, such views often ignore the long and varied history of cosmopolitanism as both an aesthetic and a worldview. There is no single vision of cosmopolitanism and by no means is it exclusive of national identity. While it is true that some cosmopolitan theorists advocate for an entirely rootless global identity, others such as Bruce Robbins propose “actually existing cosmopolitanisms” (Robbins 1998). For some, it would seem that the quintessential cosmopolitan is a wealthy, well-educated traveler, one whose worldly vision stems from leisurely and costly trips around the globe. More realistically, though, the cosmopolitans of the twenty-first century are also migrants, refugees, and emigres. This is precisely the form of cosmopolitanism we see in the work of Caribbean artists Junot Díaz and René Pérez Joglar—a postcolonial global consciousness that elevates individualism and respect for differences at the same time as it remains grounded in the nation.

Although Díaz and Pérez Joglar draw inspiration from varied sources, it is worth noting that both artists mention the Irish writer and dramatist Oscar Wilde in their work and performance. Díaz’s 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* refers to a mispronunciation of “Oscar Wilde,” while Pérez Joglar paid tribute to Wilde during his live performance at the 2011 Viña del Mar International Song Festival. Albeit brief, such nods to the famed Irish writer provide a valuable hint at the ideas that have shaped these Caribbean visions of cosmopolitanism. Wilde may be known best for his lighthearted plays, but he considered the notion of cosmopolitanism in his critical essays, particularly in a theory of individualism in his 1891 essay “The Soul of Man Under Socialism.” Combined with historic solidarities between Ireland and the Caribbean, Wilde’s philosophy provides a useful lens through which to view notions of cosmopolitanism and migration in Díaz’s Pulitzer prize-winning novel as well as in Pérez Joglar’s 2017 musical album and documentary film *Residente*. In this essay, I propose to explore the ways in which both works present a contemporary view of cosmopolitanism, not as a lofty, elite mindset but as a global identity rooted in the hard realities of colonization and immigration. Not only does this reality maintain a sense of national identity, it holds the possibility of overcoming the narrow mindsets and abusive practices of the past.

Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism and Oscar Wilde

Margaret Kennedy’s discussion of Wilde’s cosmopolitanism as a mediation between the local and the global (Kennedy 2013, 111–112) has many implications for the works of Díaz and Pérez Joglar. In her article “Wilde’s Cosmopolitanism: The Importance of Being Worldly,” Kennedy traces Wilde’s philosophy to its roots in Greek stoicism. The term cosmopolitanism, from the ancient Greek *kosmopolitês* (“citizen of the world”), dates back to 412 B.C. The stoics viewed themselves as citizens of the world, resisting the predominant distinction between self and other. Kennedy notes: “They felt their state, or polis, was an extension of the cosmos, the entire world. Put in practice, this meant adopting an attitude of peaceful coexistence and tolerance, treating fellow citizens kindly, including conquered enemies or slaves” (91). More recently, cosmopolitanism has included a range of theorists such as Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Bruce Robbins. Regarding the latter two, Kennedy distinguishes between rooted and

rootless cosmopolitanism: “Bruce Robbins, who emphasizes ‘actually existing’ cosmopolitanisms, describes a move toward rooted cosmopolitanism, but some, like Nussbaum, still argue for a decidedly ‘rootless’ version with no allegiances except to a single world community” (93).

While cosmopolitanism is not necessarily exclusive of national identity, neither is it necessarily an elitist position. As scholars such as Paul Rabinow (1986) and Arjun Appadurai (1991) have suggested, processes of globalization have created new kinds of cosmopolitanism. Cultural theorist James Clifford (1997) points out that travel includes not only “Westerners” traveling to developing countries, but also the reverse. This second kind of traveler follows the trajectory of “a different cosmopolitanism,” says Clifford (5). Susan Stanford Friedman adds that cosmopolitanism is no longer the privilege of elite travelers but is now understood to include migrants, those who move in search of a better life (2007, 261). Robbins notes that although cosmopolitanism “has seemed to be a luxuriously free-floating view from above,” these new voices of cosmopolitan theory “now insist [...] that the term should be extended to transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged—indeed, often coerced” (1998, 1). Benita Parry has a similar idea when she refers to an emergent postcolonial cosmopolitanism (1991, 41).

If the transnational flow of people and products is the cause of cosmopolitan viewpoints, what is the effect? Kennedy summarizes the central idea of cosmopolitanism, which “is not a reduction of all cultures into one world community but coexistence—a conjunction of the local and the global” (2013, 93). Most cosmopolitan theory, whether rooted or rootless, implies that moving beyond national borders leads to respect and tolerance for Others. Seyla Benhabib focuses on the implications of cosmopolitan norms on modern, democratic nation states, positing: “The presence of others who do not share the dominant culture’s memories and morals poses a challenge to the democratic legislatures to rearticulate the meaning of democratic universalism. Far from leading to the disintegration of the culture of democracy, such challenges reveal the depth and breadth of the culture of democracy” (2006, 69).

Peaceful coexistence is at the heart of Wilde’s plays, which promote open-mindedness, tolerance and good-will—“elements of Wilde’s cosmopolitanism [that are] demonstrative of his ethical aestheticism” (Kennedy 2013, 103). Kennedy suggests that in plays such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* eccentric characters provoke the audience to reconsider their social viewpoints—something which René Pérez Joglar also invites his audiences to do, and which the eccentric Oscar may well achieve in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

Wilde’s position as an Irish colonial subject living and writing in England could be a source of affinity for Pérez Joglar and Díaz. For Pérez Joglar, a native of Puerto Rico, life and politics are problematically divided between the island and the mainland United States. Díaz was born in the Dominican Republic and arrived in the United States as a child; like his characters’ identity, his is a product of both nations and cultures. Oscar Wilde also represents, for many observers, multifaceted identity. Terry Eagleton notes: “If [Wilde] was ‘doubled’ in his sexuality, as both husband and homosexual lover, he was equally Janus-faced in his nationality” (1991, xii). He was born into an Anglo-Irish family in Dublin, and even his name suggests tension between Ireland and England: “He

was christened Oscar after a legendary Irish hero, but ‘Wilde’ is a notably non-Gaelic surname” (xii). Eagleton describes the condition of a Protestant Irishman as an internal exile, suggesting that Wilde could never fully identify with Ireland or with England. Thus, social performance plays an important role in the author’s life and work. Pierpaolo Martino suggests that Wilde “performed” his identity in adopting London dandy identities (2013, 143–144), and Eagleton asserts that masks were important in Wilde’s works for this reason: “It is no wonder, then, that he believed so devoutly that surface was all—that reality was just a question of style and pose, that if you stripped off one mask you simply found another” (1991, xv). One of Wilde’s most iconic works, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), has at its center a confusion of identities, a play of masks, inversion of gender roles and verbal complexities (Martino 2013, 145).

Wilde often blurs the line between self and others—not only in the confusion of identities often present in his fictional work, but also in his theories on individualism, socialism and cosmopolitanism. In “The Critic as Artist,” when two characters debate the role of the art critic in society, one asserts that individual personality is an element of revelation: “If you wish to understand others you must intensify your own individualism” (Wilde 1991a, 34). He later states that art springs from personality (35), and that it is the critic’s role to show audiences the work of art “in some new relation to our age” (36). Thus, while a work may originate in an artist’s personality, it requires an Other to interpret it in new contexts. “The Soul of Man Under Socialism” also reveals this paradox, as he argues that “socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody” (1991c, 389). Although socialism focuses on the collective, Wilde sees its main value in the elimination of political and economic forces that prohibit people from reaching their individual human potential: “Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism” (390). In light of these ideas, Wilde’s unique character makes perfect sense—the author envisioned a world where, unfettered by national or social conventions, one could simply be. As he famously states in this essay: “One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all” (395).

For Eagleton, it was precisely Wilde’s marginality that provided him with the perspective and insight to parody societal norms and create great comedies: “[C]omedy is bred, among other things, of an ironic awareness of the arbitrary nature of social conventions, and nobody is better placed to appreciate this ‘constructed’ nature of social reality than the outsider who has never taken such conventions for granted in the first place” (1991, xv). In fact, much of the major “English” literature of the modern period was the product of exiles and expatriates, signaling a constant tension between the margins and the center (xvi). Here, to employ the terminology of Paul Gilroy (1993), we see the struggle between *roots* and *routes*. In his study of the African diaspora, Gilroy argues that national culture does not create or secure identity; rather, identity is formed through roots (distinct cultures embedded in particular places) and routes (the circulation of peoples and cultures) (190). This tension is also present in the work of Díaz and Pérez Joglar, and I hypothesize that each artist uses this perspective to promote global citizenship and goodwill even as they criticize limits imposed by national cultures and governments.

Oscar Wao's Cosmos: Science Fiction and Cosmopolitanism

Although criticism of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* has not drawn any connection to Wilde beyond the title itself, Díaz's work relates to Wilde on deeper levels related to cosmopolitanism, gender, and individualism. Díaz published his first short story collection, *Drown*, in 1997 and his first novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, in 2007. Both as literary critic and artist, Díaz has received accolades and recognition for his work: a Pulitzer Prize for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in 2008 and a MacArthur Genius Grant in 2012. Since he was born in the Dominican Republic and emigrated to New Jersey as a child, he might also be seen as having “one foot in and one foot out,” as Eagleton observed regarding Wilde (1989, 12). Meghan O'Rourke of *Slate Magazine* describes his fiction as “propelled by its attention to the energetic hybridity of American life” (2007, 1). He writes in a combination of English and Spanish, often mixing high and low genres in his work.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao follows the trials and tribulations of a young man named Oscar and his Dominican-American family living in New Jersey. The protagonist's full name is Oscar de León Cabral, however, the title refers to him as Oscar Wao—a reference to a scene in the novel where Oscar's classmates think he looks like Oscar Wilde, but mispronounce the name. Through identity struggles in Oscar and other characters and the narration's back and forth movement between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic, Díaz critiques cultural gender norms and presents cosmopolitanism as a mediation between the local and the global. When O'Rourke asks Díaz why he chose to organize the novel in a fragmented fashion—one that spans many decades and tells the stories of various people related to Oscar, Díaz responds that he is the product of a fragmented world: “Take a brief look at Dominican or Caribbean history and you'll see that the structure of this book is more in keeping with the reality of this history than with its most popular myth: that of unity and continuity. In my mind the book was supposed to take the shape of an archipelago; it was supposed to be a textual Caribbean” (2).

Díaz opens his novel with two epigraphs, one from the Marvel Comic series *Fantastic Four* and one from St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott. These epigraphs, in combination, reveal two prevalent themes in the novel: science fiction and Caribbean identity. Oscar's character is a reader and aspiring writer of comic books and science fiction novels, like Díaz himself. Oscar's friend Yunior, the narrator, uses science fiction to explain the history of the Dominican Republic, from the “fukú curse” that arrived with Christopher Columbus to the watchful, evil eye of dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1891–1961), whose repressive regime ruled the island nation from 1930 to 1961. The first epigraph alludes to a cosmic force of evil in its reference to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's comic book series, *Fantastic Four* (1966): “Of what import are brief, nameless lives...to Galactus?” This reference sets up the comparison throughout the novel of Trujillo to classic science fiction villains—Galactus of Marvel Comics, Sauron of *Lord of the Rings*, and Darkseid of DC Comics, among others. It also presents an ethical question, both to the narrator and the reader. In an interview with John Zuarino, Díaz notes that when this quote appears in *Fantastic Four*, the question is directed to The Watcher, the person telling the story. Yunior, *Oscar Wao's* storyteller, also refers to himself as a Watcher. Díaz explains, “I think that in some ways it's asking a question of the reader more than anything, because in some ways,

depending on how you answer that question, it really decides whether you're Galactus or not" (Zuarino 2007). The author goes on to remark that even people who lead brief, nameless lives sometimes care very little, or not at all, about other nameless lives. To Díaz, then, the way that one views anonymous Others is a defining characteristic of one's self.

The second epigraph is a fragment of Walcott's "The Schooner Flight," an epic poem about a character named Shabine. Although Shabine loves his family and his island (presumably St. Lucia), he takes the schooner voyage and leaves home forever, disillusioned by growing corruption on the island. Shabine could be read as an allegory for his island, or for the Caribbean in general, and the final lines of the fragment Díaz has chosen reflect his hybrid identity:

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

In an interview with Díaz, Edwidge Danticat explains her interpretation of this epigraph: "I was preparing to read about this one life, [...] this person who is immediately named in the very title of the book and is claimed from namelessness. But I ended up reading about a nation" (2007, 2). By telling the stories of Oscar and the people who surrounded him, Díaz also reveals a larger story about nation, migration, and the diaspora. Also, in these two epigraphs, Díaz signals two notions of space—the galaxy, in the case of *The Fantastic Four*, and the nation, in the excerpt from Walcott.

In one of the novel's many footnotes, the narrator relates Oscar's obsession with science fiction to his experience of migration: "It might have been a consequence of being Antillean (who more sci-fi than us?) or of living in the DR for the first couple years of his life and then abruptly wrenchingly relocating to New Jersey—a single green card shifting not only worlds (from Third to First) but centuries (from almost no TV or electricity to plenty of both)" (20–21). The author also explains his own immigration experience in these terms, noting that he identified with *The X-Men* because he felt like a mutant as a smart, bookish child in his poor urban community in Central New Jersey. Science fiction serves to illustrate the almost inconceivable power that dictator Trujillo exercised over the island during thirty years, something which Dominican newspaper *La Nación* described as "a cosmic force" (a quote which Díaz uses as an epigraph for Part II of the novel). Díaz connects Trujillo to supernatural forces in what he calls the "fukú curse," an ever-present evil which Yuniór claims has followed Dominicans since the time of Columbus: "[I]t is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since" (1).¹ In this way, the fukú comes to represent colonization, capitalism, and all the accompanying social norms imposed on native peoples by Europeans. However, Yuniór also connects the fukú to Trujillo, referring to him as the curse's hyperman or high priest: "No one knows whether Trujillo was the

¹ Yuniór describes the *fuku americanus* as an imperial curse that brought doom and destruction to the New World. He says that during the Trujillo era any individual who opposed Trujillo suffered tragedy and ruin—an effect of the *fuku*. He uses this as a way to introduce Oscar's story: "As I'm sure you've guessed by now, I have a fukú story too" (6).

Curse's servant or master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was *tighl'*" (3).

In addition to representing the Curse, Trujillo also represents hyper-masculinity. All the novel's main characters are, in some way, plagued by social and cultural expectations placed on them due to their gender. This is especially true for Oscar—an overweight, smart, sentimental young man who is constantly told by classmates, neighbors, and his own family: "Tú no eres nada de dominicano" (180). Oscar's sister Lola, on the other hand, embraces traits normally reserved for men in Dominican culture. Lola is a source of strength for Oscar, as she constantly looks out for her younger brother—both protecting him from jeers and encouraging him to empower himself through life changes. For her unconventional approach to womanhood, she finds herself at odds with her mother. However, part of this animosity and misunderstanding lies in her embracing non-Latino, punk culture. When she decides to shave her head like Sinéad O'Connor, for example, her mother is convinced that she is a "lesbiana" (37). Although *Oscar Wao's* plot is born out of dictatorship, the truly repressive force in the novel seems to be the gender expectations imposed on each character—social norms that originated with the arrival of Europeans to the Caribbean, thus forming part of the fukú curse. It is a double-edged suffering, as Dixia Ramírez observes: "*Oscar Wao's* characters struggle not only with patriarchal structures of power but also the suffocating pressure of performative masculinity" (2013, 384). Lola and Oscar, like Wilde, are often silenced for their queer otherness.

At the end of *Oscar Wao*, Yunior does not have a solution to these (unspoken) issues. He simply quotes Dr. Manhattan from the graphic novel series *Watchmen*, telling his readers: "In the end? [...] Nothing ever ends" (331). However, the solution might also be within the novel itself—particularly in its linguistic, cultural and geographic movement. If Yunior is able to subtly question notions of authority and masculinity, he is only able to do so from a cosmopolitan standpoint. In fact, he and Oscar, both science fiction fanboys, stretch the term to its limit. Oscar sees himself not as a citizen of the world, but as a citizen of the galaxy, of the cosmos. Addressing the reader, Yunior often calls himself "your Humble Watcher,"² also implying that his standpoint is not linked to one country or to another, but rather to the universe. These hybrid identities come from the comic books both men so uncharacteristically read³—a product of their mixed national origins, of constantly moving between two nations and cultures.

Cosmopolitanism is also present at linguistic and textual levels. Yunior code-switches throughout the novel, sometimes within the same sentence. Susan Balée suspects that Díaz's own experiences as a smart kid in a poor, immigrant community taught him to strategically switch languages: "He learned to code switch. Not just from language to language, but from identity to identity" (2013, 345). In this sense, he very much resembles Oscar Wilde, an artist and critic who moved easily between social worlds and manipulated cultural narrative from within. Balée further notes that Díaz successfully

² The Watchers are an extraterrestrial race from the Marvel Universe, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The first Watcher appears in *Fantastic Four* #13 (April 1963).

³ Reading comic books is uncharacteristic of Yunior and Oscar, in part, because it does not fit with Dominican expectations of masculinity. However, it is also true that Latinx representation in comic books, until very recently, has been notoriously scarce. See *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics* by Frederick Luis Aldama (2017).

harnesses language and narrative to code-switch between genres: “Junot Díaz embodies the energy that comes from mixed genres. He is a mestizo from the DR who lives in the US. He oscillates between the two cultures, just as he oscillates between English and Spanish in his fiction. He, the master crafter of narratives, also makes sure that the most intellectual of his readers—professors, like he is at MIT—can see that he has their discourses down too” (346). This is clear when Yunió is describing the brutally long beating that Oscar received in the cane fields of the Dominican Republic: “It was like one of those nightmare eight-a.m. MLA panels: *endless*” (299). In one sense, this code-switching results in relatability: diverse readers can identify with *Oscar Wao*, from comic book fans and Dominican-Americans from poor neighborhoods to academic elites (although, as Díaz demonstrates, one could be all three). On the other hand, as some critics have pointed out, it results in a sense of otherness. For example, monolingual English speakers will, at times, feel uncomfortable due to their inability to comprehend the Spanish words, and non-academics might easily miss the joke about the MLA.

Díaz’s use of language could also be seen as an act of rebellion and individuality, that is, of refusing to conform to a given set of linguistic norms. Danticat addresses this idea when she notes his frequent use of “the N-bomb” in *Oscar Wao*, asking the author if he is concerned about backlash. He responds by noting that Yunió uses this word, not Oscar, suggesting that linguistic markers play an important role in characterization. In a more general sense, he is unapologetic: “[L]anguage has never been a good dog and its free exercise will never provide comfort to cultures of respectability. And I guess I’ve never really been one for comforting my readers either” (Danticat 2007, 6).

Ultimately, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is the story of Oscar’s struggle for individualism—what Wilde considered the ultimate right to develop oneself how one chooses, without worrying about government or empty social norms such as gender expression. The novel, with its focus on Oscar’s personal struggle, highlights that defensive nationalism and diasporic identity often result in added pressures: while living in the United States, Oscar is still expected to conform to Dominican cultural norms. Ultimately, he is never fully accepted by either culture. Díaz seemed conscious of this issue when asked in the *Slate* interview whether he felt a duty to represent Dominican culture in his writing: “As a person of color living in the U.S. you’re often considered an extension of your group—individualism is hard to come by” (qtd. in O’Rourke 2007, 6). His character Oscar, as a result of his own individualism and the suffering it has caused him, displays a sense of goodwill toward others. Yunió relates Oscar’s final days as a high school teacher: “Every day, he watched the ‘cool’ kids torture the crap out of the fat, the ugly, the smart, the poor, the dark, the black, the unpopular, the African, the Indian, the Arab, the immigrant, the strange, the femenino, the gay—and in every one of these clashes he saw himself” (264). Oscar, though deemed a “nobody” by his peers, is also Everybody. In the end, this might be the superpower he so wished to have. While dealing with two national identities is certainly part of Oscar’s struggle in the novel, it also makes him a more compassionate and tolerant human being.

Cosmopolitanism in *Oscar Wao* does not equate to the loss of national identity. Oscar simply identifies with (and feels the pressures of) two nations rather than one. Likewise, Oscar Wilde’s brand of cosmopolitanism did not assume disloyalty to a nation or the absence of national identity, but rather

a fluidity of identity. As Benhabib writes: “the very binarism between nationals and foreigners, citizens and migrants is sociologically inadequate and the reality is much more fluid, as many citizens are of migrant origin, and many nationals themselves are foreign-born” (2006, 68). In other words, rooted cosmopolitanism does not override or negate national identity; it simply expands its scope, revealing that national and ethnic backgrounds are often much more complicated than constructed national myths of identity. The same narrative is gaining ground in science, as the Human Genome Project and the trend of at-home DNA kits reveal to people around the world that their genetic information does not always match their ethnic narratives.

Roots and Routes in Pérez Joglar’s *Residente*

The science of DNA testing is also working itself into art, as evidenced by *Residente*, the 2017 documentary film by René Pérez Joglar. Pérez Joglar, who goes by the artistic name of “Residente” (like the film), is a Puerto Rican writer, producer, and cofounder of the alternative rap group Calle 13. Initially a self-taught musician, Pérez Joglar later completed a Master of Fine Arts at Savannah School of Design in Georgia. From the outset of his musical career with Calle 13, the artist linked his musical production with social and political activism; as he notes in an interview for Barcelona’s *El Periódico*: “En Puerto Rico, naces y ya estás en política” (qtd. in Bianciotto 2004, 1). In addition to winning more Grammys than any other Latin artist, he has served as the public face of Amnesty International and UNICEF campaigns and received the 2015 Nobel Peace Summit Award for his song lyrics and support for social causes.⁴ In 2017, as various members of Calle 13 parted ways to pursue other ventures, Pérez Joglar debuted a solo project that includes a musical album, a companion documentary film and an interactive website—all based on a DNA test the artist had taken on a whim. In an interview with NPR’s Felix Contreras, Pérez Joglar explains that curiosity led him to explore his genealogy: “In school they teach that you come from Taínos, Africans, Spanish people, but I knew I was more. I knew that I had more in my blood” (Contreras 2017). Still, some of the results were surprising to the rapper and songwriter, who then decided to visit four parts of the world where he had an unexpected ancestral connection, making music at each stop.

The result of *Residente*’s genealogically inspired journey is, not unlike *Oscar Wao*, a reflection on individualism and the dangers of becoming entrenched in “us versus them” historical narratives. During his first stop, Siberia, Residente recorded the song “Abnormal” with local folk musicians. As Contreras describes the song: “The lyrics refer to chromosomes slow-dancing, giving birth to strange creatures, people who don’t fit the expectations of normal, the beauty of the impure. It is the sound of a man coming to terms with his own genetic labyrinth” (Contreras 2017). The video, also shot in Siberia, features a graphic birth scene and then a battle between the “children” born of that mother,

⁴ Pérez Joglar has received four Grammy Awards and twenty-four Latin Grammy Awards. Most of these were with his band Calle 13. However, he accepted his three most recent awards as a solo artist—*Residente* received a Grammy for “Best Latin Rock, Urban, or Alternative Album” in 2018, as well as a Latin Grammy for “Mejor álbum de música urbana.” A song from the album *Somos anormales* also received “Mejor canción urbana” at the 18th Latin Grammy Awards in 2017.

which ultimately ends in a make-out scene. Pérez Joglar explains to NPR's Christina Cala: "We came from the same vagina. And at the end we're fighting because of nothing, and we forget what we're fighting for" (Cala 2017). This theme continues into the next region, the Caucasus, with the song "Guerra," recorded between the warring regions of Tbilisi, Georgia, and Ossetia.

Residente continues his journey across the globe, making stops in Georgia, China, Burkina Faso, and Ghana, although there are also deviations from the route. There is a certain rebellion in these deviations, which are reminiscent of Oscar Wilde's aesthetic. In China, for example, Residente has almost finished recording an apocalyptic song about pollution with a bar singer from Beijing when he realizes that something is missing. This intuition takes him to Barcelona and then to London, chasing a pipe organ. Pérez Joglar as narrator has already told viewers about his younger years as an impulsive child; now, he notes: "I was looking for a specific sound, and since I am so impulsive, I decided to go to London, to the Temple Church" (Pérez Joglar 2017, 48:14). At each destination, Pérez Joglar as narrator sets up a similar dynamic of conflict and imbalance but finalizes each segment with a harmonious musical commentary on the lessons, both personal and political, he has learned. In Ghana, he collaborates with Dagomba tribal singers to write a song for his son; in Burkina Faso, Tuareg electric guitarist Bombino, an exile from Nigeria, plays a track with Residente about living in the shadows. The album's list of collaborators is remarkable and reflects the artist's global vision: French actress and singer Soko, the Peking Opera, Goran Bregovik's brass band in Serbia, playwright/musician Lin-Manuel Miranda in New York, and others. A few years before this album was recorded, Miranda and Pérez Joglar discovered they were cousins. For his track on the album, Miranda tells the story of this discovery and muses about the surprises in our DNA:

Scientists can separate a strand
Tell you what percentages descendants you long to understand
Send you to lands of oyster and sand
A map of the world the lines in your hand
And you'll find what you planned isn't quite what you get

In the chorus, Miranda refers to himself and Pérez Joglar as "global artists in residence," proposing, in a mix of Spanish and English, to let their rhymes be the bridge that changes the world (Pérez Joglar 2017, 1:09).

Miranda's term "global artists in residence" is appropriate, considering the album's play on routes and roots. However, "Residente" did not always represent the global. The artistic name originally surfaced as the title of Calle 13's 2007 album, *Residente o Visitante*. Pérez Joglar's stepbrother, José Cabra Martínez, was also a member of the band. He took the stage name of Visitante in reference to both men's childhood, growing up in two different households. Cabra often visited Pérez Joglar in his gated community in Puerto Rico. Pérez Joglar explains in an interview: "In Puerto Rico you have certain barrios or neighborhoods with a guard and you have to say your name and address before you go inside. Calle 13 was the name of the street and I had to say that I was a resident. My stepbrother was a visitor. It was a joke but later on it took more power because of the immigrant thing. It took on

a whole new meaning” (qtd. in Nunn 2011). Here we see the artist’s expanding definition of place and belonging. While the 2007 album uses “Residente” as a reference initially to a local street in Puerto Rico and then employs it as a symbol of Latin American migration, his solo album picks up the thread ten years later and uses it to represent the artist as a resident of the world. It is a reconstitution of identity similar to that described by Benhabib in her iterations of the local, the national, and the global: “The democratic people can reconstitute itself through such acts of democratic iteration so as to enable the extension of democratic voice. Aliens can become residents, and residents can become citizens. Democracies require porous borders” (2006, 68).

Although Residente acknowledges the global routes his ancestors followed, he also maintains robust pride in his national roots. Ultimately, the documentary film’s journey returns to Pérez Joglar’s native Puerto Rico. Residente summarizes the colonial history of the island from the Spanish conquest to the U.S. military government established in 1898, through the Foraker and Jones Acts, the Ponce Massacre, and the Statehood movement into the present day. The painful history of his island is the inspiration for the album’s last song, “Plena lamento,” recorded with traditional instruments such as the cuatro. What is most impressive to Residente is the resilience of the island in the face of so many challenges: “We have endured over 100 years of colonization without losing our accent. That’s why I know that even if we have to start again from nothing we’re going to move our country forward” (Pérez Joglar 2017, 1:27)

This is not the first time that Residente has sung about the endurance of his people. Calle 13’s 2014 song “El aguante,” from the album *Multi-viral*, also touches on what the Latin American people have endured, from pesticides and climate change to military dictatorships. Interestingly, the song begins with the sound of traditional Celtic flute and fiddle. The video of the song, directed by Kacho López Mari, takes place in an Irish pub. Pérez Joglar explains: “La letra nace gracias a las influencias musicales celta-indígenas. Irlanda tiene forma de ser un país lleno de tabernas (pubs) y de gente feliz, que trabaja duro, peculiarmente capaces de tolerar la bebida pero además se les identifica con la resistencia. Basándome en eso establecí una analogía con todo lo que hemos aguantado, todo lo que estamos aguantando y lo que nos falta aguantar como seres humanos” (qtd. in “Calle 13 ya no aguanta” 2014).

In addition to borrowing sounds and imagery from Ireland for “El aguante,” Pérez Joglar also paid homage to Oscar Wilde during a 2011 performance at the Viña del Mar International Song Festival in Chile. He introduces the chorus of a song about rebellion, engaging the audience in the responses: “Nos gusta el desorden, uo uo uooo / rompemos con las reglas, uo uo uooo / somos indisciplinados uo uo uooo / todos los malcriados,” and then explains: “Vamos a portarnos mal. Como John Lennon [...] como Oscar Wilde” (Pérez Joglar 2011, 15:40).

As for Junot Díaz, it is worth noting that although the Dominican author makes no reference to Oscar Wilde (aside from Oscar’s nickname), he does acknowledge an affinity to the Irish in his interview with Edwidge Danticat: “Lola wants Oscar to be the Dominican James Joyce but Oscar just wants to be a Dominican Andre Norton. I’m a Joyce fanatic—the Irish have had a colonial relationship with the English a long, long time and that’s one reason they’re so useful to immigrant writers of color

in the US” (Danticat 2007, 5). Both Junot Díaz and René Pérez Joglar, like Wilde and other Irish writers, understand the dilemma—but also the possibilities—of being “internal exiles.”

Conclusions: Cosmopolitan Affinities

Both these contemporary Caribbean artists express cosmopolitan visions that are still rooted in the hard realities of colonization and immigration. Considering the long and varied history of cosmopolitanism, their philosophies could have been influenced by a number of theorists; however, it is significant that both mention Oscar Wilde, a writer from across the Atlantic whose island nation also struggled against colonial forces. Ireland and Latin America have a shared history of colonization, and they often find affinities in stories of colonial resistance, revolutionary movements, and exile. In *Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature*, Maria McGarrity posits a geographic bond between Ireland and the Caribbean: the Gulf Stream “connects the seemingly disparate, the islands and streams of the Caribbean Sea with those throughout the North Atlantic, the Irish islands particularly” (2008, 9). McGarrity notes that Ireland and nations of the Caribbean struggle with the weight of their colonial pasts. Both national and regional discourses overflow with studies of empire and its effects, although “[s]tudies on colonialism have far too often relied on the national characteristics of the respective imperial powers to configure their analysis” (18).

While neither author has directly acknowledged the influence of Wilde, *Residente* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* demonstrate an affinity for Wilde’s philosophy and legacy that go far beyond their subtle references to the Irish thinker and writer. In both works critical standpoints on nation and identity are possible from a cosmopolitan perspective that crosses national borders while also blurring the lines between language, gender and genre. Gianpiero Petriglieri of the *Harvard Business Review* notes: “Cosmopolitanism [...] has become a tainted luxury good” (2016). However, he goes on to underline the importance of re-examining this notion: “[N]ow is the time to take a stand for cosmopolitanism—extricating its broadminded attitude from its elitist parody, and putting it to work to temper nationalism and humanize globalization.” René Pérez Joglar and Junot Díaz are doing just that: putting forth a refreshed, twenty-first century vision of global citizenship. This identity expands the scope of national and ethnic narratives, promoting—like Wilde—an attitude of goodwill toward Others and a society where the individual may flourish.

References

Aldama, Frederick Luis
2017 *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Appadurai, Arjun

1991 "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by Richard G. Fox, 48–65. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony

2005 *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Balée, Susan

2013 "Caves, Masks, and Code Switching: The Inventive Narratives of Junot Díaz." *The Hudson Review* 66 (2): 337–352.

Benhabib, Seyla

2006 "Democratic Iterations: The Local, the National, and the Global." In *Another Cosmopolitanism*, edited by Robert Post, 45–74. New York: Oxford Scholarship.

Bianciotto, Jordi

2014 "Entrevista con el cantante de Calle 13." *El Periódico* (Barcelona), July 11.
<https://www.elperiodico.com/es>.

Cala, Christina

2017 "Residente Journeys Across the World—and Finds Himself." *Alt.Latino*, March 23.
<https://www.npr.org>.

Calle 13

2014 "El aguante." *Multi-viral*. Directed by Kacho López Mari.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUk73pUe9i4>.

"Calle 13 ya no aguanta"

2014 *El Nuevo Día* (Puerto Rico), Feb. 18. <https://www.elnuevodia.com>.

Clifford, James

1997 *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Contreras, Felix

2017 "Guest DJ: Residente on Life and Music after Calle 13." Audio interview with René Pérez Joglar. *Alt.Latino*, August 17. <https://www.npr.org>.

Danticat, Edwidge

2007 "Junot Díaz." Interview. *BombMagazine*, October 1. <https://bombmagazine.org>.

Díaz, Junot

2007 *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead.

Eagleton, Terry

1989 *Saint Oscar*. Derry: Field Day.

1991 "Introduction." In *Oscar Wilde: Plays, Prose Writings and Poems*, xi-xxvii. New York: Everyman's Library.

Friedman, Susan Stanford

2007 "Migrations, Diasporas, and Borders." In *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, edited by David G. Nicholls, 260–293. New York: MLA.

Gilroy, Paul

1993 *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kennedy, Margaret

2013 "Wilde's Cosmopolitanism: The Importance of Being Worldly." In *Wilde's Wiles: Studies of the Influences on Oscar Wilde and His Enduring Influence in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Annette M. Magid, 90–113. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

Lee, Stan and Jack Kirby

1966 *Fantastic Four* 1 (49, April). New York: Marvel Comics Group.

Martino, Pierpaolo

2013 "The Wilde Legacy: Performing Wilde's Paradigm in the Twenty-First Century." In *Wilde's Wiles: Studies of the Influences on Oscar Wilde and His Enduring Influence in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Annette M. Magid, 140–158. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.

McGarrity, Maria

2008 *Washed by the Gulf Stream: The Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature*. Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Nunn, Jerry

2011 "Interview: Residente of Calle 13." *Gozamos*, May 11. <http://gozamos.com>.

Nussbaum, Martha C.

1996 "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." In *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, edited by Martha Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen, 3–20. Boston: Beacon.

O'Rourke, Meghan

2007 "Questions for Junot Díaz." *Slate Magazine*, Nov. 8. <http://www.slate.com>.

Parry, Benita

1991 "The Contradictions of Cultural Studies." *Transition* 53: 37–45.

Pérez Jøglar, René

2011 *Vamos a portarnos mal*. Performance. Viña del Mar International Song Festival, Chile, 15:35. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kulMVJgruIE>.

Pérez Joglar, René “Residente.” dir.

2017 *Residente*. Paraíso Pictures.

Petriglieri, Gianpiero

2016 “In Defense of Cosmopolitanism.” *Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 15. <https://hbr.org>.

Pollock, Sheldon et al.

2002 *Cosmopolitanisms*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rabinow, Paul

1986 “Representations are Social Facts.” In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 234–261. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ramírez, Dixa

2013 “Great Men’s magic: charting hyper-masculinity and supernatural discourses of power in Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.” *Atlantic Studies* 10 (3): 384–405.

Robbins, Bruce

1998 “Actually Existing Cosmopolitanisms.” *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, edited by Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, 1–19. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Skovgaard-Smith, Irene

2017 “The Complex World of the Global Citizen.” *BBC Capital*, Nov. 10. <http://www.bbc.com>.

Walcott, Derek

2014 *The Poetry of Derek Walcott 1948-2013*, selected by Glyn Maxwell. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Wilde, Oscar

1991a “The Critic as Artist.” *Oscar Wilde: Plays, Prose Writings and Poems*, 3-67. New York: Everyman’s Library. First published 1891.

1991b *The Importance of Being Earnest*. *Oscar Wilde: Plays, Prose Writings and Poems*, 481–542. New York: Everyman’s Library. First published 1895.

1991c “The Soul of Man Under Socialism.” *Oscar Wilde: Plays, Prose Writings and Poems*, 387–422. New York: Everyman’s Library. First published 1891.

Zuarino, John

2007 “An Interview with Junot Díaz.” *Bookslut*, Sept. <http://www.bookslut.com>.